

The Making of Modern Britain - From Queen Victoria to V.E. Day
by Andrew Marr.
Macmillan 2009.

Those with a keen association with Andrew Marr's writing, whether from his newspaper days or his previous books, or who have watched him as BBC political editor, interviewer on his own show or presenter of three outstanding television series will be well aware of his superb skill as a communicator, his linguistic precision and his ready sense of humour.

In The Making of Modern Britain, written as a companion to the TV series of the same name, all of Andrew Marr's skills as a writer are plainly on view in what is a highly compelling book.

Tracing the history of Britain from the Edwardian period up to the end of the Second World War in Europe, Andrew Marr presents a fascinating analysis not just of the way our nation developed over those tumultuous 44 years, but of the people who facilitated that change in a multiplicity of ways.

The pages of The Making of Modern Britain positively heave with events and individuals, and Marr shows a rare ability to encapsulate complex events in a few brief pages without leaving the reader feeling short-changed. His eye for detail also unearths a wonderful range of hitherto - to me at any rate - little known figures, such as the writer Edith Bland, nee Nesbit, the politician Edwin Montagu, the press baron Alfred Harmsworth, later Lord Northcliffe, and the missionary Sir Henry Lunn, who unwittingly created winter sports holidays.

Throughout the book, as the story unfolds, Marr maintains half an eye on the future, so that the reader is constantly aware of the way events in the first half of the twentieth century contributed to the formation of the Great Britain we know today, and even when he describes grim or terrible situations his use of language reflects the twinkle in his eye which leavens the material and makes it even more memorable.

The Making of Modern Britain should be read by anyone with a keen interest in our recent history, and especially by those puzzled or intrigued as to why the British are as they are today.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh